

A Mental Health Note

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The abolition of slavery over 150 years ago did not bring an end to injustice, oppression and brutality against Black people. Racism is a relational trauma, which means it's not just a random act, or a system of injustice that causes the trauma - it's people that cause the trauma.

The consequences of racial trauma are intergenerational, and affect our overall wellbeing - psychologically, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. In order to heal from racial trauma we have to talk about it. That's because trauma affects us even when we don't talk about it. When we avoid the truth we pass down our hurts, and our fears, to the next generation. As White people we disown the truth, the shame of causing or malignantly ignoring abuse; as Black people we have to figure out creative ways of living with the constant threat of death.

The City of Alexandria Community Remembrance Project has committed to being a part of this healing process by confronting the harsh reality of our shared history. They have meticulously researched and re-examined the brutal details of the murder of Benjamin Thomas in 1899. This re-counting is a small way to give a voice to Benjamin Thomas, to his family, and his community. This narrative cannot correct a wrong that can never be undone, but it seeks to honor him, and those who tried resist this atrocity.

For some, reading this story may cause discomfort, feelings of sadness, fear, betrayal, pain, or anger. These emotions are a normal response to traumatic stories, allow yourself to feel them, reflect on them, and connect. For some, the story may cut deeply, and it may bring up your own history of traumatic experiences, which is normal too. Or, you may find yourself distancing, or numbing out when you read about what happened to Benjamin Thomas. This response is a normal way to protect yourself, but you may want to be curious about this and ask yourself why you had to distance yourself? And then listen carefully to the answer. It may help to journal about the ways you reacted to the story, or talk to others and share your responses. Take some time to meditate, to breathe, to reconnect with what's important. Take a walk in nature, in your neighborhood, look up at the sky, or ground yourself in reality through mindfulness exercises. For some, it may be necessary to seek mental health support. Racial trauma is real, with real psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual consequences - so find someone to help walk you through the healing process, you don't have to do this alone.